



researcher's handbook

LIMERICK CITY LIBRARY MILLENNIUM PROJECT

researchers handbook researcher by Sinéad McCole

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mayor's address */meɪ/ˈɑːdrɪs/*

It gives me great pleasure during my mayoralty to be associated with the publication by Limerick Corporation of a *Researcher's Handbook: Sources for Twentieth Century Irish History*. This publication displays the fact that Limerick Corporation as a body is not only involved in Housing, Watering & Sewage etc. but also the education and culture of the citizens of Limerick city.

Our library service is concerned with strengthening communities, enhancing the quality of life and developing partnerships with other organisations, not least Educational Institutions. It was through the Historian in Residence Programme that the idea was born for this publication. Such was the success of the Historian in Residence Workshops and the demand by students for assistance in carrying out Research, that the decision was taken to produce a Researcher's Handbook to guide students through a maze of information.

One of the front headlines in the *Irish Times*, 16th August, 2000 states "History goes from bad to worse in the Leaving Cert". The special history topic is a guaranteed question in the Leaving Certificate where students can pick up full marks. The *Irish Times* editorial also states that there "is a deepening perception that history is a difficult, time consuming subject with little points potential". The *Researcher's Handbook*, if used by every student in the country has the potential to change these statements.

This Handbook has been funded by Limerick Corporation as a project for the new millennium. I wish to convey my thanks to all involved in this particular project.

CLLR. JOHN RYAN
MAYOR OF LIMERICK

foreword /fɔːrwɜːd/

Limerick Corporation is proud of the very successful series of Historian in Residence workshops, which were organised for the benefit of second level students by Limerick City Library. This resulting Researcher's Handbook, makes available to students, not only in Limerick but throughout the country the technique and skills to conduct research.

Branching Out a new Public Library Service report states that "the public library is uniquely placed as a community based pillar of learning opportunity, which is capable of creating, nurturing and sustaining awareness of the value of learning and of providing mediated access to resources which assist the process of learning throughout life" p.60. In this Historical Researcher's Handbook, Sinéad McCoole has very cleverly used the resources of the library, both physical and staffing to show students how to carry out research in their local library. The handbook displays how the public library bridges gaps by providing accurate and up-to-date information for every event and by providing a continually updated collection of reference works in print and electronic form.

The Internet, which is the buzzword of today, does not have all the answers for someone doing research. It has been compared to a vacuum cleaner, which sucks up text from world-wide-web sites and indexes it into large databases. The user is overwhelmed by results and may have to sift through hoards of information to come across one jewel. It is of course, just one tool for carrying out research. This handbook guides the researcher through the primary and secondary sources of information, the value of newspapers, maps and directories, how to evaluate data, sometimes the unreliability of oral history and finally editing the material.

We hope that this handbook and the very successful Historian in Residence Programme will:

- * create an awareness of the library as a valuable source for research
- * portray the library as an educational institution
- * bring second level students to the Public Library who may not otherwise use it
- * educate students on how to conduct research, which will give them lifelong skills in their future studies

BRENDAN KEATING LIMERICK CITY MANAGER
DOLORES DOYLE LIMERICK CITY LIBRARIAN

introduction /ɪntrə'dʒʊʃn/

The discovery of a new version of historical events may seem an alien concept to you, as you read the pages of your school history book, but each generation has its own slant on these facts and you and your classmates are the historians of the future. You can find new historical characters whose role in events warrant their story being recorded – it doesn't matter if it is in a school essay or a parish magazine, the main objective is to get that story into the historical record. New documentation and material does survive, hidden in attics, in archives or in the memories of your next door neighbour.

The first step when you are starting out on any project is to choose a topic that holds your interest. Think about your interests. Seek out a subject that is as individual as you are. Are there family or local stories about which you have always been curious? Did one of your ancestors take part in the fighting during Easter Week 1916? Or perhaps a relative was a soldier in one of the World Wars? Was your street once the scene of an historic event? Is there a local monument about which you have always wanted more information? You may already be aware of sources, local characters, and places that have potential material but you just don't know how to get started.

If you find a topic that has never been explored previously, you can then put your own stamp on a piece of history. The investigative work of the historian, like that of a detective or a journalist, pieces the evidence together from clues. Those clues, the raw materials of history, are all around us; a good researcher finds evidence in all sorts of places. When history is written in text books, it can be difficult to imagine that these facts have been gleaned from a range of sources - letters, diaries, cabinet minutes, radio interviews, newspapers, legal documents, national statistics and even songs and poetry.

Lunenburg Prison

18th 1. 19.

my dear Mother

I received yours of yesternight whilst at exercise today. Need I say how shocked I am at your news of Peg's death hoping & expecting that she was on the route to recovery & even tho' your news of her is so bad somehow I cannot doubt that she will pull thro'. She was always so healthy & robust that even her disposition must be a big asset in fighting the battle. Please let me know each day how she is & expect to "Recover" tomorrow & will offer up my Communion for her speedy recovery.

I am very glad you are not lonely & that Kit & Gus & Hugh are with you. The latter I am sure, is a host in himself - would you put him into my room & let him be as to keep my bed warm!

You should have had a letter this morning re collars & laundry. Send me up a duck pair of socks there should be several such pairs in my wardrobe.

I am fit & well & really there is no occasion to bother about me at all. Try & put me out of your mind & just treat my absence as if I were away for a few days. You must have enough to worry about without wasting any thought on me.

Miss Bridget Scott surprised her with my kind ways when I got home. Will be all right if I don't dismantle my bed & fold up my bedclothes with the beginning. How go she by the way? I suppose the morian is in it.

family means extra work for her. Does Annie help
her in the spare time she has from Hugh?

Do try & cease thinking of me & about
all dont worry as there is absolutely no cause
for doing so

Remembers me to all

Best

History is ever changing — our perception of events and characters can be radically altered as new evidence comes to light. You can play a part in reSe⁵arching, assessing and writing about the constant evolution of history. You may be the historian of the future who will uncover new evidence on the background to the Civil War. It could be you who finds out the real story of the Beef Tribunal, when all the official documents become public some years hence; or on the international stage make a discovery about the Gulf War or the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Any research project undertaken has the potential to contain new information and a fresh outlook. The more innovative **you** are about collecting research, the more time and effort you put in, the better the outcome — remember this is your chance to rewrite history!

There are merits to researching close to home. There are always gems that can be found by those who know the locality, key players and events. Your local library must be the starting point. The expertise of staff at the local library can refer you to sources printed locally, for example, parish magazines and books privately printed and not readily available in other locations. The staff can often identify potential sources outside the library, a local expert or a possible interviewee, a private collection or material held in other institutions such as the local museum. Researchers are often put off from using their local libraries believing that the national institutions and copyright libraries hold everything they need and spend time, money and effort before looking closer to home. Before you travel — walk through the door of your local library and you will learn that you can access a world of books. This book sets out to make your job of researching and finding source material a little easier.